



# Analyzing the Concept of Narrative Time in Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve*: A Narratological Study

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**Abstract**— This study endeavors to explicate *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) by Kamala Markandaya through the perspective of narratology to study the narrative of Rukmani. Kamala Markandaya is prominent storyteller who is interested in both 'what' and 'how' of narratives which becomes the basis of this study. Narratology being the study of narratives focuses on how the narrative are presented, what are its structures and the ways it affect our perception. The study follows the framework by Gerard Genette to analyse narrative time in the chosen novel. The nature of this study is twofold; first, it discusses the framework of narratology and its constituent tenets, which provides the framework to investigate any narrative and second, it analyzes *Nectar in a Sieve* in the light of narratology. Narratology comprises many tenets such as focalization, discourse, narrative modes, narrator, characters, and time. Among these characteristics, this study focuses on 'time'. This study emphasizes on the Genette's two fundamental oppositions of discourse time and story time and how Markandaya has employed it in *Nectar in a Sieve* to assist the reader in understanding the narrative of Rukmani which has the backdrop of exploitation and dispossession of the peasants from the intrusion of industrial tannery. The study allows for critical implications, both for the readers who wish to understand Markandaya better and for the researcher who aims to understand the narrative analysis of the novel.



**Keywords**— Kamala Markandaya, *Nectar in a Sieve*, narrative time, order, frequency, ellipses, summary, analepsis, prolepsis.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Kamala Markandaya is an eminent storyteller who is interested in both 'what' and 'how' of narratives and to narrate the stories she uses different narrative technique which are filled with modes of expression and narration. She is an author of ten novels where she voices about the discrimination between poor and upper class, eastern and western notion, hunger, poverty, women suppression, rural and urban divide and middle class city dwellers. She presents female characters as narrators in most of her novels, which provides an unblemished picture of the society. This study commence with the study of one of her most acclaimed novel, *Nectar in a Sieve* to understand her art of storytelling through the approach of Narratology. Her attachment and keenness towards past time has proved and

justified through her novels as most of her novels start with *in medias res* (Prince, 2003). She follows Eliot's concept of the past derived from his famous essay "Tradition and Individual Talent" which asserts that the artists must have "a sense of past not only of the pastness of past, but its presence in past" (Eliot, 1919). Markandaya's techniques in manipulating story and discourse time in order to provide the reader with different setup gives her novel an integrated structure (Chaudhary, 2015). The present paper attempts to observe how Marakandaya manipulates time in *Nectar in a Sieve* and make her text dynamic and reader-oriented through the forthright techniques of order, duration, and frequency.

*Nectar in a Sieve* is a novel which narrates the events of nearly forty years of Rukmani's life and is divided in

two parts, with thirty chapters comprised in 192 pages. It is a story of Rukmani, a peasant in a southern village of India, her conjugal life, and the circumstances she faces during her lifetime due to the intrusion of industrialization. It has the backdrop of the independence of India and the evolution of industrialization and their effect on the farmers' life. It is a narrative of the main events related to Rukmani's life as she witnesses a series of unfortunate situations; the death of her two sons, i.e., Raja and Kuthi, her husband, and old Granny. She also has to witness Ira's diversion to prostitution to provide food for her brother and the invasion of the tannery, which becomes the root cause of all of her problems. She also has to leave her home and land and go to the city, in order to sustain the life which ultimately disappoints her and she realizes the unsuitability of urban life, and returns to the village with Puli, the adopted son. The novel begins with Rukmani's recollection of memories of her husband and then slowly moves to the past when she starts narrating the marriage of her sisters and then moves further. It mostly moves chronologically through the bouts of analepsis till the end of the novel and forms a circular pattern as it comes to a halt where it began.

## II. METHODOLOGY

A close reading of *Nectar in a Sieve*, and the secondary text that involves research on her works and application of narratology in fiction is prepared through the analysis of the primary and secondary texts. The method of this study is the narrative analysis as it is used for recognition of underlying ideologies embedded in stories (Stokes, 2003). This study further applies the framework of narratology to construe the nature and structure of *Nectar in a Sieve* by Kamala Markandaya, as this text is opulent with excerpts to interpret it from the narratological perspective.

## III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Kamala Markandaya is researched variously from thematic aspect, feminist approach and from the approach of interdisciplinary aspects such as Eco criticism and Eco feminism. (Biswas, 2022) discusses the sociological perspective and impact of Industrialization in *Nectar in a Sieve* and deduces the deep humanitarian concern of Markandaya as well as how she portrayed the changing India through the narrative of a peasant lives. The researcher has opted the methodology of textual analysis for analysing Markandaya's fiction.

(Sharnappa, 2016) studies the concept of ecofeminism in regard to *Nectar in a Sieve* by Markandaya. The

researcher construes that the novels of Indian English enhances new insights to ecofeminist discourse and deduces that the main reason for the destruction of ecology cannot be abridged to patriarchy rather it's due to anthropocentric attitude.

(Mahalaxmi, 2016) explores the thematic study of *Nectar in a Sieve* while focusing on east west divide, poverty, starvation, realistic picture of Rural India, dislocation and disintegration, materialistic value etc. She concludes that these are the prominent themes in her novel and further explains that poverty, hunger, and starvation can lead families to terrible degradation.

(Narmathanandhini, 2018) explores the women's disequilibria in Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* and throws light from the perspective of Rukmani regarding the suffering of women and the biases present in society for female gender.

(Harrex, 1971) opines that Markandaya's understanding of women's sensibility and the representation of women's attitudes in the social, political, and spiritual crisis makes her a different and unique novelist from her contemporaries.

(Buyukkarci, 2020) deals with the narratological study of *The Ransom of Red Chief* by O. Henry' while focusing specifically on the character, time and space. The researcher deduces how O. Henry portrayed story world by using different techniques and adequate narration of the story.

(Battol et al., 2021) discusses the narrative strategies used by Khaled Hosseini in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* applying Gerard Genette's narrative theory and focuses on various narrative devices such as time, duration, frequency, and ellipses, which made the novel an impressive piece of writing.

(Abdulrazziq, et al., 2021) discusses the application of narratology in Charles Dickens *Great Expectations*. The researchers further analyses the central tenets of narratology, i.e., order, duration, as well as frequency and how it is apparent in *Great Expectations*.

However, after reviewing the literature on Kamala Markandaya, it is discernible that researchers focused mainly on the thematic interpretation of her novels, whereas very few talked about the techniques and styles. It is also apparent that no researcher has employed narratology as a tool to understand her works, whereas some other fiction and short story is studied through narratological perspective. Hence there's ample scope for the application of narratology as a tool to understand and interpret the works of Markandaya.

#### IV. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

##### Narratology

Narratology as a discipline is established in the mid-1960s in the field of literary theories and has evolved significantly over the last few decades. The theory is applied to understand new texts as well as provides new acumens into older works. Gerard Genette, propounded the study of narrative theory in his *Narrative Discourse*, says that narratology is a method of analysis and the point of such analysis was to understand the standard features of any narrative. Mieke Bal, a major narratologist, explains the discipline in her *Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, as "Narratology is the ensemble of theories of narratives, narrative texts, images, spectacles, events, cultural artifacts that 'tell a story.'" (Bal, 1985). Further, she confirms that narrative theory helps to comprehend, analyze, and evaluate narratives. Similarly, Peter Berry, a literary theorist, states, 'Narratology is the study of narrative, narrative structures and the ways that these affect our perception' (Berry, 2020). Narratology comprises many tenets and analyses narrative characteristics such as story, text, narration, tense, focalization, discourse, narrative modes, narrator, characters, and time. Among these elements and characteristics, this study focuses on 'time'.

##### Narrative

Before delving into the concept of time in the narrative, one has to understand the terms associated with narratology to understand the concept thoroughly and its application in fiction. Gerald Prince, a narratologist describes the term narrative as "The representation (as product and process, object and act, structure and structuration) of one or more real or fictive events communicated by one, two, or several (more or less overt) narrators to one two or several (more or less overt) narrates in time sequence." (Prince, 2003). In other words, telling or presenting a story can be termed as the narrative. Whereas Genette classifies the narrative into two categories, 1) primary narrative which he calls 'extra diegetic', and 2) framed narrative which he says 'intra diegetic' (Genette, 1980). He further explains the term narrator as the one who narrates story.

##### The concept of Narrative time

This study focuses on one of the major aspect of narratology, i.e., the narrative time. According to Manfred Jahn, one of the most indispensable formative element in a narrative is time and it has been researched and discussed throughout the history of narrative analysis (Jahn, 2017). Time is one of the textual factor which is examined in relation to story. Kenan in her book opines 'Time in narrative fiction can be defined as the relations of chronology between story and text' and further elaborates

that 'Time is further studied in three respects: order, duration and frequency' (Kenan, 2003).

##### Order

Gerard Genette emphasizes the discrepancy between story and text order and determines that the main types of discrepancy between them is conventionally recognized as flashback and foreshadowing which he termed as 'analepsis' and 'prolepsis' (Genette, 1980). This is further simplified by Jahn, who opines order as 'the handling of the chronology of the story'.

##### Duration

Duration is another term used by Genette which determines the relationship between story and discourse time. Story time represents to the time of narrated events in a story whereas the discourse time is the actual representation of the narrated events within a discourse. To understand this concept, (Fludernik, 2006) gives an as example, that we can summarize someone's entire life in a single sentence or we can take a twenty pages to recount events occurring over a 24- hour period. Genette elaborates that there are discrepancies between story and discourse time which are further categorized as *summary, scene, ellipsis, pause, and slowdown* (Genette, 1980).

##### Frequency

The term refers to the frequency of events narrated in a narrative. (Kenan, 2003) agrees with Genette's description of the term as 'the relation between the number of times an event appears in the story and the number of times it is narrated or mentioned in the text.' Genette further classifies it into three category, *singulative, repetitive and iterative* (Genette, 1980).

#### V. ANALYSIS OF NARRATIVE TIME IN NECTAR IN A SIEVE

The study is twofold in nature which firstly began with the discussion of framework of narratology which is based on the analysis of story, text, and narration which further categorized into the tenets of narratology i.e., narrators, types of narrators, narrative agency, focalization, and the discourse time and story time (Jahn, 2021) and secondly, the novel *Nectar in a Sieve* by Kamala Markandaya is to be analysed from the perspective of narratology and focuses mainly on time. The study follows the framework of Genette and Rimmon Kenan to analyse the select novel.

Time is one of the major components of story which every author uses according to their suitability in relation to story and narration. Markandaya being an eminent storyteller deserve all the accolades for *Nectar in a Sieve* which compelled the reader to riveting narrative of Rukmani. She

does not present the narrative in a chronological order instead she shift, manipulates time, stretching the story over forty years. She uses the technique of ellipses, summary, scene, pause, stretch, analepsis, prolepsis, iterative, descriptive, singulative to amend the narrative time to story time. Markandaya uses these techniques to arouse the interest in reader as the delays excites the curiosity, inquisitiveness and suspense in the story.

In this section, the part of the story where Marakandaya has used the technique related to time shift are brought and then analyzed. The narrative opens with auto diegetic narration which introduces the reader to the narrator of the novel.

"Sometimes at night I think that my husband is with me again, coming gently through the mists, and we are tranquil together. Then morning comes, the wavering grey turns to gold, there is a string within as the sleepers awake, and he softly departs." (Markandaya, 1)

Rukmani's narration allows the reader to peep into her thoughts as she reminisces her husband who is no more with her and she feels tranquility when she recalls that her husband was with her. Through the passage it is apparent that Markandaya uses the technique of *in medias res* to start her novel which is 'shift in order' of the story.

"How well I remember the day, and the sudden sickness that overcame me when the moment for departure came! My mother in the doorway, no tears in her eyes but her face bloated with their weight. My father standing a little in front of her, waiting to see us safely on our way. My husband, seated already on the bullock cart with the tin trunk full of cooking vessels and my saris next to him. Somehow I found myself also sitting in the cart, in finery, with downcast eyes. Then the cart began to move, lurching as the bullocks got awkwardly into rhythm. And I was sick." (Markandaya, 5)

Seven lines are devoted for the description of Rukmani's departure from her home to Nathan's house. This thorough explanation of an event is an example of 'pause' as this passage discerns that the events in the story are interrupted and the explanation of Rukmani's departure is described to show the reader the financial condition of the family.

"A few days later he began working at the tannery, and before long Thambi, my second son, had joined him." (Markandaya, 54)

And,

"And I listened to him. All day we sat there in the rain breaking stones and for the whole of that

week, Nathan grew neither better nor worse. On the seventh day the ague came upon him again, but he did not stop work. A kind of frenzy drove him on." (Markandaya, 188)

These two passages are instances of 'summary' in which the events of the story are accelerated. 'The whole of that week', 'seventh day', 'few days later', shows that discourse time is summarized and accelerated to the story time. Within one line, a week passes as she narrates the event of seven days in one life just by saying, the whole of that week. The technique shows her skillful narration of summary and also portrays that nothing important has happened between those days.

"And so the years rolled by and still we had only one child, and that a daughter." (Markandaya, 20)

This line is an example of 'analepsis' and 'summary' which detects that nothing much has happened between these years. Rukmani's narration of 'the years rolled by' takes the reader to read this line in few seconds whereas the events of the story have actually happened in a much larger scale of the time.

"We walked back jubilant that day in the coppery light....and I took his head in my lap and set my hands to massaging the pain from his limbs." (Markandaya, 183-186)

The four pages from pg.183-186 in the novel describes single days event in life of Rukmani and Nathan, which is an example of 'Pause'. Rukmani narrates the events of one day which encompasses earning more money in a day, buying rice cakes and pancakes for herself and Nathan, and buying cart for her grandson and also conveys the Nathan's illness and is described in length. The passage portrays the characteristic and nature of Rukmani which states their happiness.

"Ira was seven when my first son was born, and she took a great interest in the newcomer. Poor child, it must have been lonely for her all those years." (Markandaya, 22)

The passage is an example of 'analepsis' as Rukmani is narrating about the experience of giving birth to first boy after years of barrenness. Here, Ira is seven years old and she had not witnessed anything substantial in terms of companionship in all these years so she is elated with the coming of new born. Through this analeptic movement Ira's loneliness is emphasized. The technique of analepsis is benevolent of reflective aspect of the past. This technique is achieved through the nonlinear chronology of events as this device is one of the prevalent method of narration to portray the relevant facts.



Then extravagance grew frenzied, encouraged by this lapse, and I could not stop myself from taking out two more annas to buy another cart. For my little grandson, I thought, who has had so much to bear from his birth, and I pictured his white transparent cheeks flushing with excitement while Ira hovered nearby with her face like a flower and rare smile that graced it. (Markandaya, 185)

And in

I must see about a carter. May be it will be as much as we have reconed, then we can leave at once. My mind wandered to my home; would it still be there? I saw before me my daughter and the shy white-faced Sacrabani. And Puli...if only he would come, how happy we would be, my husband and I! Not Puli, though; he would certainly refuse. I shall miss him, I thought sadly. (Markandaya, 188)

These two passages are examples of 'prolepsis' as it talks about the foreshadowing of Rukmani's thought when she thinks about her grandson and Ira's happiness on receiving the cart from the city. She also wonders whether Puli will join her to village or not. The narration takes a leap forward in time at this moment.

"And every month I put away a rupee or two against the time Ira would be married. So we still could not grumble." (Markandaya, 26)

The inconsistency between the text time and story time creates the kind of temporary gaps in narrative as it is completely organized by the author. The passage shows the 'gap' in the story time and narrative time and also reflects the technique of analepsis and summary to match the current story line.

"my lord, my benefactor, I cried. Many a time I have longed to see you. Now at last you come, and I bent down to kiss your feet, shod as they were in leather shoes." (Markandaya, 50)

The passage is an example of 'iterative' narration as Rukmani utters 'many a time' which becomes evident that she has visited many times in order to meet Dr. Kenny but narrated only once about the incidence. The frequency of the narrated event shows the importance of the event.

"Ira had been fed well on milk and butter and rice; Arjun too, for he was the first boy. But for those who came after, there was less and less. Four more sons I bore in as many years- Thambi, Murugan, Raja and Selvam." (Markandaya, 24)

The passage is an example of 'summary' as well as 'ellipses' which shows how the author conveys the events of many years in just one sentence. Although the sentence

is very important to make the reader understand about the story yet it is narrated in just one line.

"Disbelief first; disillusionment; anger, reproach, pain. To find out after so many years, in such a cruel way. Kali's words: 'She has fire in her body, men burn before and after.' My husband was of those men. He had known her not once but twice; he had gone back to give her second son." (Markandaya, 88)

The passage is an example of 'ellipses' as the reader does not know about the relation between Kali and Nathan. The reader neither know what kind of relationship they hold and when did they make out to produce two children as well. The readers are not provided with any kind of information regarding the encounter between Kali and Nathan and the whole situation is narrated through Rukmani. This shows her anger and anger and disillusionment after knowing her husband's adultery.

"He was nearing fifty and no longer as healthy as he had been. He had begun to suffer from rheumatism, and apart from this had had several attacks of fever, from each of which he recovered more slowly and emerged weaker." (Markandaya, 131)

and,

"'They can't,' I remember saying helplessly. 'It is our land; we have been here thirty years.'" (Markandaya, 134)

These passage becomes examples of 'summary' as the events of years is narrated in one sentence 'nearing fifty' and 'here thirty years' shows the countable numbers and reflects that the author has provided the summary of all these years to emphasize the characteristics of the event.

"So good to be home at last, at last. The cart jolted to a standstill. I looked about me at the land and it was life of my starving spirit. I felt the earth beneath my feet and wept for happiness. The time of in between, already a memory, coiled away like a snake within its hole." (Markandaya, 192)

The concluding passage of the novel is an example of analepsis as it narrates the happiness of Rukmani after reaching her village and also throws light on the circular nature of the narrative as it end where it started from. Rukmani's choice of not revealing the city life experience to Selvam and Ira by saying "I will tell you later" inform reader about the circular nature of the story.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The framework of narratology and specifically time is studied and analyzed in Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* in the present study. The technique of time manipulation, blending of present and past, twisting the order of events, and frequency offers a perplexing intricacies to the novel. The understanding of the concept of time leads to the better understanding of the form and the content of the novel. Genette's framework is applied to understand these technique of nonlinear sequence of events in the novel which arouses the emotional quotient and moral retorts of the reader as these techniques inhibits the reader to read the novel carefully and alertly to understand the hidden meaning and the aesthetic construction of the novel. The novel reveals Markandaya's portrayal of the agony of the poverty, changing condition of post-independence India, the effect of industrialization on peasant lives, and decay of humanism prevalent in the society. The novel is her finest achievement and deserves all accolades as through her narrative techniques specifically time manipulation which is further divided in order, duration and frequency provides the better understanding of the novel. This assist the reader to not lost in the time rather understand the perspective of Rukmani which echoes the appearance of the rural patriarchal attitude of the society. The skimming of the novel appears linear chronology though the narratological analysis implies that narrative of Rukmani is narrated through the memory, stances of analepsis, prolepsis, scene and pause. Markandaya has skillfully blended the past with present events to obtain coherency in the novel.

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